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ABSTRACT

Tremont Consolidated Grammar School (Maine) has changed little in the past 50 years. The wisdom of Paulo Freire and other educators shows that student empowerment, critical thinking, and parent involvement are necessary for true education, particularly for oppressed people. An ecological approach to education involves the family, the community, business people, and educators to benefit students. The work of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE), the League of Schools Reaching Out, and the Center for Families, Schools, Communities and Children's Learning are built on these assumptions. These organizations have developed techniques, often involving action research teams, to improve communication among school constituencies. These ideas can be applied to Tremont Consolidated Grammar School in a rural community on Mount Desert Island in Maine. Tremont is the poorest town on the Island with low rates of postsecondary education, despite high achievement scores and high school success. Many cultural traits of the homogeneous population of Tremont promote education, but other traits impede students' aspirations to higher education. Programs and strategies for raising educational aspirations are suggested that involve the whole community and address the cultural factors of fatalism, constancy, fear of children leaving the area, reluctance to assume debt, fear of the dominant society, lack of critical sense, fear of community criticism, pettiness and small mindedness, and reluctance to think abstractly or develop long-term goals. Contains 72 references. (KS)

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YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE:

Involving the Community in Children's Aspirations
A Proposal for Tremont Consolidated Grammar School, Tremont, Maine

Barbara Kent Lawrence

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Involving the Community in Children's Aspirations
A Proposal for Tremont Consolidated Grammar School

In this paper, I will first discuss education as a force for empowerment and then look at the work of The Institute for Responsive Education, The League of Schools Reaching Out and the Center on Families, Communities, School & Children's Learning. I will use this work in designing a program to raise aspirations for post-secondary education for Tremont Consolidated Grammar School in Downeast Maine. I realize that in doing do I violate the fundamental premise that issues and solutions must evolve from within the community, not from without. This is ,therefore, only an attempt to apply research that interests me greatly to a school, community and culture which I have known intimately for fifteen years.

In an earlier paper, I outlined state and private programs created to change aspirations. However, these programs fail to reach deeply enough into local culture to create lasting change. I think that applied appropriately the philosophy and methods developed by IRE and The Center can reach deeply enough into a culture. By forging links, between the schools, parents, and communities these strategies can create lasting change.

My reading makes me realize IRE is leading us back to the future, a future that exists at Tremont School because it has changed so little in the past fifty years. However, the community of Tremont needs help if it is to resist unwelcome change and welcome change that will allow its people to reflect and act wisely, to achieve "cultural synthesis" which appreciates differences and uses them creatively (Freire, 1993:162).

EMPOWERMENT:

> In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.
>
> Freire, 1993:31

The wisdom of Paulo Freire guides our understanding of empowerment, illuminating both the forces that disable and the strengths by which people become empowered. Freire dissects the causes of oppression and self-oppression as those oppressed mimic their masters. He lays out for educators the oppressive dangers of schooling and the liberating power of true education.

E + ducere: to lead out, to bring forth. Freire asks, by implication, that we reconsider the Latin root of education and question if there must be a leader and a follower. If only self-education has lasting value then the role of the educator must be to give freedom by standing out of the way of others (Dennison, Gatto) A true teacher, one who is constantly learning from his/her students and from life, must create a stage for dialectic, a forum in which student and teacher discover both their strengths and the restrictive elements in their selves, families, communities and culture.

To the extent that schools and schooling reflect the needs of the dominant society, they do not serve children, particularly those from lower socioeconomic strata of society. Radical change is not in the interest of institutions whose primary goal is self-perpetuation because the dominant society fears critical thinking leads to thinking critically. Hannah Arendt noted, "the aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any (Gatto, 1993:xi). "

Perhaps, it is fear of informed opinion that has led our schools to limit discussion of beliefs, the end-product of critical thinking, disguising their intentions as protection for the innocent minds of students vulnerable to their teachers' ideas. We have created a school culture that perpetuates itself because no one, student, teacher or administrator, learns to question. By taking discussion of relevant ideas out of student-teacher conversation, we have rendered ideas irrelevant.

John Gatto, twice named New York State Teacher of the Year :

> began to realize that the bells and the confinement, the crazy sequences, the age-segregation, the lack of privacy, the constant surveillance, and all the rest of the national curriculum of schooling were designed exactly as if someone had set out to *prevent* children from learning how to think and act, to coax them into addiction and dependent behavior.
>
> Gatto, 1993:xii).

Only when he realized he was teaching "an invisible curriculum that reinforced the myths of the school institution and those of an economy based on caste" could Gatto become a "guerilla" using tactics to "subvert the system."

Gatto echoes Freire's "banking concept of education" where "education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor (Freire, 1993:53). "[I] dropped the idea that I was an expert, whose job it was to fill the little heads with my expertise, and began to explore how I could remove those obstacles that prevented the inherent genius of children from gathering itself." Gatto shares his secret strategy: "I get out of kids' way, I give them space and time and respect (Gatto, 1993:xiv)."

Montcrieff Cochran helps us identify what must be removed from the paths children take:

> social class structure, structural differentiations by race and gender, and perhaps even the influences of bureaucratization upon individuals and groups... For groups assigned less value by those criteria, the unequal distribution of resources based upon such discrimination represents an obstacle that stands in the way of full development throughout the life span.
>
> Cochran, 1987:11

Marques and Fernandez show us in their study of Portuguese schools that these issues pervade many cultures.

> As for Portuguese low-income families and the social and ethnic minorities, the greatest obstacle to parent involvement in the schools comes about because of the disparities that exist between the cultural values, characteristics, and social norms of these groups and the cultural values, characteristics and norms that prevail in the dominant school system. Teachers and schools are controlled by a middle-class model that defines "good families" and that does not give credence to the wide range of cultural diversity present among families from the lower socio-economic classes and from racial and ethnic minorities.
>
> Marques, 1989:2

Researchers have shown that parental involvement in schools is critical if children are to succeed academically. Yet, low-income parents often are reluctant to become involved because they fear humiliation and feel only the "experts" know what it best for their children. These attitudes limit their opportunity to become empowered which limits their ability to make informed choices for their children and themselves.

Empowerment, as defined by Virginia Vanderslice, is " a process through which people become more able to influence those people and organizations that effect their lives and the lives of those they care about (Cochran, 1987:10). In short, by using "critical reflection" people are able to identify obstacles and make choices about how to deal with them: by removing them, walking around them, or carrying them along. Only having identified the obstacles to freedom can individuals resist oppression. The promise of true education is to open

minds to awareness of hidden obstacles and allow freedom of choice in dealing with them, to encourage reflection and action.

Freire proposes the model of "problem-solving education" in which " people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 1993:64)." Once they achieve "background awareness" and understand the forces that give them a base but also entrap them, they can begin to free themselves from this matrix of culture, community, family and self. This "process of *becoming*" is never finished, in fact "in this incompletion and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation." Problem-posing education asks individuals in their dual roles of teacher and student to question, creating dialogue "indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality " (Freire, 1987:64-65)."

People *can* succeed in identifying and changing patterns that have held them prisoner but from which they do not want to escape completely. Gordon Donaldson found that about 10% of youths from the small rural community of "Sawyer" Maine were "questioning" and described them as:

> intrepid spirits, [who] strive for .integration of what they have learned is good on the outside (a job skill or friendship, for example) and what they know is good within Sawyer... They have " an ideology, a statement of ideals, which reaches above the material and beyond the present... These young men and women accept the merits and the inevitability of modernization but seek new ways to integrate it without destroying the old community values and spirit at the same time. The identity of these youth is closely tied to their commitment to assisting Sawyer make this integration.
>
> Donaldson, 1984:11

Maine needs to foster the intrepid spirit in all her children, helping them graft the strengths of family and community to experience and perspective gained through education and critical thinking. My hope is that, thus enriched, they return to grow again in the earth that nurtures their roots.

THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Americans spend more money on schooling than other industrialized nations, yet our children do poorly when compared with children of these countries. In 1991, American thirteen year-olds ranked thirteenth in Math, twelfth in Science and ninth of fourteen nations tested. Only Jordanians scored lower in math, only the Irish and Jordanians scored lower in Science (U.S. Department of Education, 1993:83-85). Perhaps, part of the problem is that we do not understand the distinction between schooling and education.

The ecological approach to education clarifies the importance of this distinction.

> The simple fact is that children are a part of, and are influenced by several institutions: the family, neighborhoods, racial and ethnic communities: churches, schools, health and social agencies; workplaces and employers; and the city and state in which they live.
>
> The "ecosystem" is complex and interactive...
>
> Strategies to improve the education of disadvantaged children, are most likely to work if they are based on this ecological perspective
>
> Davies, 1987:5

This seems equally true of all children, not just the more obviously disadvantaged.

Many "embedded influences" impact a child's life (Epstein, 1992:1140). "The school is one of numerous social systems (family, neighborhood, workplace, and

health clinics, among others) that operate simultaneously within the social sphere. In each sphere the individual assumes a number of roles, each bearing a particular status in the hierarchy (Winter, 1993:10)." How could we think schools alone could educate children ?

The ecological perspective shows that by working together, using all the resources available to a child, we have a chance to educate. In the biting words of John Gatto:

> No large scale reform is ever going to work to repair our damaged society until we force open the idea of school to include "family" as the main engine of education. If we use schooling to break children away from parents - and make no mistake, that has been the central function of schools since John Cotton announced it as the purpose of the Bay Colony schools in 1650 and Horace Mann announced it as the purpose of Massachusetts schools in 1850 - we're going to have the horror show we have now .
>
> Gatto, 1992:37

Education based on the ecological perspective strives to empower all members of the child's world, including the child, because by doing so each will be strengthened and contribute more fully to the other. Henderson summarizes the research substantiating these benefits:

> When parents are involved, children do better in school., and they go to better schools... Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved.
>
> Davies, 1988:3.

The ecological perspective accomplishes its goals by "valuing" the contributions or potential contributions of all members of the school community.

"Valuing" as applied by Anne Lewis to young people could equally describe the conditions that encourage people of any age to do their best work.

> We know from research as well as from common sense that young people need respect, fairness, confidence in their growing integrity, and a sense of hope for themselves as human beings. By valuing young people, we keep them engaged and motivate them to set goals for themselves.
>
> Lewis, 1990:421

Teachers, parents, administrators, community members, business people and students all benefit by being valued.

An interesting experiment conducted by the Aspirations Project at University of Maine, Orono, asked all adults in the school to think of the "least huggable" student and try treating him/her as if s/he were in fact "huggable." Participants reported an extraordinary turn-around in the attitude of these students who beamed back when the spotlight of friendship and caring shone on them (Cobb, Interview:1994).

The ecological perspective attempts to remove obstacles from a student's path by making certain assumptions:

> 1. The aim is empowerment.
> 2. all children can succeed
> 3. all families have *some* strengths, an assumption that [runs] counter to the basic deficit perspective which is one of the basic tenets of service provision in the United States.
> 4. much of the most valid and useful knowledge about the rearing of children is lodged among the people - across generations, in the networks, and in the historically and culturally rooted folkways of ethnic and cultural traditions...
> 5. a variety of family forms are not only in operation but are also legitimate, and could promote the development of both healthy children and healthy adults.
> 6. cultural traditions are both valid and valuable.
>
> Cochran, Davies, 1987, 1988

The programs of The Institute for Responsive Education, The League of Schools Reaching Out and The Center for Families, Schools, Communities and

Children's Learning all are built on these assumptions and succeed to the extent they fulfill goals compatible with these values.

The work of IRE and The Center addresses the question of how to motivate and engage students. Their suggestions are deceptively simple and demonstrate that Occam's razor still has the edge necessary to cut through layers of institutional fat. Changing people's expectations of each other allows them to see themselves and each other anew and to create new ways of being. Jeff Howard and Ray Hammond describe this process in their article "Rumors of Inferiority."

> The Expectancy/Performance Model: The powerful effect of expectancies of performance has been proved, but the way the process works is less well understood. Expectancies affect behavior: the capacity to marshall the sharpness and intensity required for competitive success. And they influence cognition: the mental processes by which people make sense of everyday life....
>
> When people who are confident of doing well at a task are confronted with unexpected failure, they tend to attribute the failure to inadequate *effort*. The likely response to another encounter with the same or similar task is to work harder. People who come to task expecting to fail, on the other hand, attribute their failure to lack of ability.
>
> Howard and Hammond, 1985:20

Negative expectations poison the relationships of parents, children, teachers, community members: everyone who could and should be a resource for the child and for each other. We tend to fulfill what others prophesy for us. The strategies and philosophy of IRE and The Center try to detoxify these relationships and help people learn to expect the best of each other and themselves.

IRE STRATEGIES and TECHNIQUES:Communication on a Human Scale

The thirty-four schools in thirteen states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico that form The League of Schools Reaching Out, in association with IRE and The Center have developed techniques and strategies to improve communication between school constituencies: teachers, administrators, parents, communities and children. These ideas have evolved to meet specific needs identified in most cases by an Action Research Team whose members represent the constituent groups, except in almost all cases children.

I hope that these teams will include students whenever possible. Even though their experience is limited it is *their* experience and students can often be more open and honest in addressing issues than adults. Sometimes we forget that our primary goal is to educate children not provide employment for adults.

Parent Action Research Teams:

"Action research is a process whereby people can develop their own diagnosis and prescription, thereby acting out their self-interest and gaining a sense of power (Palmer, 1974:6)." Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen, who helped articulate a framework for action research listed " six basic components of any action research program..." They are:legitimacy, human scale, capacity to deal with conflict, individual and collective empowerment, and ability to organize human beings. Palmer and Jacobsen divided action research into four stages in which a group of people representing all constituencies in a school identify a central issue, form a hypothesis to investigate, gather pertinent literature, design research instruments, collect and analyze data and draw conclusions, as any researchers would do. The difference between academic

or scientific research and action research is that the people in the community participate fully from beginning to end (Palmer, 1974:19)." As they identify problems that are important to them and begin to understand the origins of those problems they confront real obstacles blocking solutions. Working with a facilitator they begin to understand that dividing into *we vs them* diminishes resources and that only in partnership can they remove obstacles or redefine a path. It is clear that Freire deeply influenced Palmer and Jacobsen, and that their works underlies much of what the IRE and The Center have accomplished.

Mentoring and Tutoring: The Research Action Team at Samuel Gompers Fine Arts Option School in Southside Chicago hoped to "encourage increases in student self-esteem and achievement by providing students with positive role models(Burch, 1993:12)." The Principal recruited fourteen men from the community who were seen by the children as "peacekeepers,honorable men and fathers." These men helped in classrooms, worked with individual students, tutored, counseled and noticeably reduced the degree of tension and violence in the school. The mentoring program was so successful that girls asked for their own mentors and two female physicians joined the program (Davies, 1993:72).

Parent Centers: Having their own resource room encourages parents to be in the school and gives them a base. The Ellis School in Boston established a parent-center and found that "it made possible the substantial, continuing, and positive physical presence of family members in the school." The school provided a small classroom and Chapter 1 funds paid a parent to be present in the room throughout the school day. It is important that there be adult sized chairs and tables, a couch if possible, a telephone and facility for light cooking

such as a microwave. Encouraging parents to come to school, to share experiences, to be a part of their child's world makes it clear to teachers and children that parents do care. It also enables the school to respond to parent's needs and form a partnership to nurture children's learning (Davies. 1991:478-79).

Home Visitors:

Hartsville , West Virginia home of the Atenville Elementary School most closely resembles Tremont, Maine where the Tremont Consolidated Grammar School is located. Hartsville is a rural community , the population is 99% Causcasian and many of the children come from low-income families. The school believes that clear and consistent communication between home and school boosts children's learning" and has devised several strategies to increase communication including a home visiting program. After appropriate training, the parent coordinator and six volunteers surveyed parents to learn about their attitudes towards the "school climate, teacher competence" and their interest in becoming involved in the school (Davies, 1993:43-45)."

Other schools such as Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School in Boston and Matthew Sherman Business and Government Preparatory School in San Diego have reached out to communities through home-visits, hoping to increase parent's self-esteem and ability to support their children by increasing their confidence in themselves and the school. The Excellent Beginnings Project at Fairfield Court Elementary School has been successful in:

> raising the self-esteem of parents. Parents have become involved in assisting their children with homework , accompanying children on field trips, assisting community organizations such as the Food Bank, and in one particular case, speaking publicly on behalf of the program and the children involved.

Davies, 1993:56

Programs in other schools have used strategies including journal-writing, keeping a biography of the child or baby, making family scrapbooks and videos, and developing brochures to help parents with specific questions.

Home visitors suggest methods to increase children's readiness to learn by bringing resources such as "Boxes for Babes" to parents houses.

> The Ferguson-Florissant [school] has created a series of activity boxes which contain different toys and materials for parents to use with their children...to foster interactions between parents and their children which are fundamental in supporting language and communication development and preventing language delay.
>
> Davies, 1993:63

Building bridges between parent and child and creating a foundation for the child's success in school increases self-esteem of both parent and child and makes it more likely the parent will view the school as a partner.

Communication:

" To help the school communicate with parents more effectively and to create a system by which parents' needs are regularly communicated to school staff" the Atenville Elementary School created a telephone tree. "Parent coordinators call parents twice a month to alert them to programs at school, invite suggestions and comments and record concerns (Davies, 1993:43)." This strategy seems particularly useful in countering rumor and gossip which so often undermine well-intentioned projects in small rural communities. Several schools send newsletters to parents on a regular basis.

In conjunction with the PATHS program the Anwatin Middle School in Minneapolis, Minnesota designed a program to lower the dropout rate of student's with behavior and learning disabilities. Thinking good communication

between parent and school was essential the program employed an innovative strategy that also raised teacher's self-esteem as it reached out to parents. The school installed a telephone and answering machine in each classroom so that teachers can reach parents and so that parents can call with questions. Teachers also use the answering machines to leave messages about homework and other school activities. Anwatin teachers also send parents a progress report in the middle of each quarter (Davies, 1993:31)." Each of these strategies and techniques attempts to draw people together, helping them cross barriers of race, gender, ethnicity and age to build on the more important similarities they share as human beings.

We must use these strategies to create situations in which all can gain. Carole Ames found that:

> parents also evaluated teachers who were high users of communication practices as more effective than those who were low users...In addition, parents' beliefs about their ability to influence their child were higher...they viewed their child as more motivated..., and they reported more involvement...when their child was in a classroom where the teacher was high, rather than low used of school-to-home communications. This, there were significant differences in parents' beliefs and perceptions as a function of the teachers' reported use of school-to-home communication.
>
> Ames, 1993:9

Not surprisingly, the opposite affect is seen under negative conditions:

> When parents believe their child is interested and believe they (the parent) can make a difference, they may become involved. This interpretation has important implications because, quite often communications from the teacher that attempt to solicit involvement convey negative information to the parent. Teachers often contact parents to tell them that their child is having trouble or is not motivated, expecting parents to volunteer assistance. Our findings suggest that such communications may not have the intended effect and may only discourage parents and make them feel less comfortable with the school and with their role as a helper.

Ames, 1993:15

Don Davies points out that blame is not a useful tool for bringing people together to raise the children of the village.

> The academic reformers start with a definition of the problem that emphasize social and academic failure on the part of many children and the failure of the schools to reach and teach many urban children well. It is obviously naive to expect that many front-line teachers or administrators will willingly define themselves so clearly as part of the problem. For this reason SRC's ecological perspective that doesn't fix the blame on anyone exclusively and calls on families and social agencies to change as well as schools, has some strategic value as a starting point for finding common music from which to sing.
>
> Davies, 1990:9

Too often, we have blamed the victim for his/her "deficit" culture and we have blamed the teacher for not doing a job that has become impossible.

By isolating children (and teachers) from their communities we have divided an indivisible responsibility. Only by bringing the severed parts together again can we give our children the resources they need. "Heath and McLaughlin go on to declare that the problems of educational achievement and academic success demand resources far beyond the scope of most families, especially low-income, low social status urban families, and call for a 'child resource policy' that draws on the combined contributions of multiple agencies and institutions (Davies, 1987:5). "

Unfortunately, many schools being "inward-looking" institutions have resisted the wisdom of involving parents in the life of the school and , therefore, the lives of their children. This has been particularly critical for poor parents and children

in two ways: teachers who look down on them reinforce negative stereotypes while those Freire would describe as "generous" excuse lack of achievement as they deny students opportunity to achieve by lowering standards(Freire, 1993:26-27).

By telling children and parents of a racial, ethnic, or cultural group that we expect less of them we doom them to doing less, not only because we all have a tendency to do what is expected of us, but because competition spurs achievement. Opting out of the competition for whatever reason, limits opportunity to develop skills. Howard and Hammond show us how this affects academic work of black students:

> Competition spurs development. The willingness to engage in competitive activity with commitment to high standards and success stimulates the discipline and effort that underlie intellectual development...
> "getting over" or dropping out represents a retreat from competition, a lack of sharpness and resolve, and an obvious loss of focus on intellectual development.
>
> Hammond and Howard, 19--:53

We can apply this description to traditional Maine students, many of whom have been told they are intellectually inferior. No one expects them to excel, and they don't. To swim against the current of negative expectations is simply more than they can do unless a person or event hauls them out of the water or extraordinary intelligence buoys them up.

PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

Let us look now at ways in which the Ideas of Paulo Freire , IRE and The Center could be applied in a small community in Maine. It will be useful to consider the recommendations of Martin Brooks and Richard Sussman who studied four such projects. They point out that ideally the community will feel a need for the intervention. If only the principal or the facilitator identifies the need, the community may resist making changes. Selecting an appropriate site is vital. The local culture should promote acceptance of parental involvement and ideally, will already have projects in place that rely on parental involvement. The school principal must be committed to parental involvement, the amount of training of parents must be reasonable, and sufficient community resources available to support the project. Brooks and Sussman suggest having multiple-sites within one system so participants can be mutually supportive, and point out the importance of symbols and clarity in goals and design of interventions. They also found that a "body of literature and/or experience that substantiates the project's ideas..; a model for action..;[and] explicit directions for activating the model (Brooks, 1990:54)." must provide an intellectual base for the project.

I think these elements are present at Tremont Consolidated Grammar School and the Mount Desert Elementary School. Though I would like to involve the Mount Desert Elementary School in a project , I will focus for the present on designing a program for Tremont School.

In creating specific strategies I have also considered Norm Fruchter's typology for parental involvement, which are:

1) programs which seek to help parents of pre-school children support the development and improve the school readiness and academic potential of their children;

2) programs which seek to improve the capacity of parents of school-age children to support their children's learning;
3) programs of school improvement seeking to accord parents significant roles, structures, and responsibilities;
4) programs to reform school governance and accountability seeking to accord to parents significant roles, structures, and responsibilities.

Thompson, 1991:19

Thus girded, let us look at the school I hope to interest in Action Research and projects to involve parents and the community in 'the lives of children.'

TREMONT CONSOLIDATED GRAMMAR SCHOOL

THE SETTING :

Mount Desert Island is connected to the coast of Downeast Maine by a causeway. The four island townships: Bar Harbor, Mount Desert, Southwest Harbor and Tremont have each developed a distinctive character since settlement by whites in the early 1700's. Bar Harbor , once the preferred destination for affluent "rusticators" as the first summer people were called, suffered a devastating fire in the fall of 1947. The fire burned many of the elegant "cottages" to which the rusticators retreated from the rigors of a

demanding social life in Newport, Rhode Island. Bar Harbor is now the most commercial of the towns though leavened by the presence of College of the Atlantic, headquarters of Acadia National Park and The Jackson Laboratory, a world renowned cancer research institution.

Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor in the township of Mount Desert, which attracted many of the families burned out in 1947 and their social heirs, comprise arguably the most expensive real estate in Maine. They still preserve the pretense of being simple villages while enjoying an extraordinary tax base and the amenities it underwrites.

Southwest Harbor and Tremont are located on the western or "backside" of the island. The term is used disparagingly by those on the eastern side of the island but with affection by people living in the less socially acceptable half of the island. Southwest Harbor has welcomed development in the past decade and the town is visibly more affluent than it was ten years ago. Although still based on fishing and boat-building, the economy of Southwest Harbor is augmented by construction, particularly condominium development, the Coast Guard Base, and several small businesses.

Tremont, the location of Tremont Consolidated Grammar School, the subject of our study, is the smallest town in population, though it covers considerably more territory than Southwest Harbor, and the poorest, most traditional community on Mount Desert Island. Most residents make a living by fishing, boat-building, care-taking, or contracting. In the 1980's real estate prices in other areas of the island rose so quickly that many young families moved to Tremont, but today, the prices even on the "backside" make it difficult for young families to move to Tremont and many have moved to the less-expensive mainland.

THE SCHOOL:

In 1948 there were fourteen schools on Mount Desert Island. Each town, had its own high school except Tremont, which tuitioned students to the high school in Southwest Harbor. In addition, there were two elementary schools in Bar Harbor, four serving the town of Mount Desert, two for Southwest Harbor and three for Tremont. Although in 1949 the four towns voted against a consolidated regional high school each decided to consolidate its elementary schools. In 1951 Tremont opened its new elementary school in Bass Harbor, the largest village in the township. This school served children in a large geographic area requiring those in the villages of Seal Cove and West Tremont to travel at least an hour a day.

Recently, the towns reconsidered consolidating the elementary schools because each school building needs considerable repair and improvement. However, after debate in the newspaper and village meetings, people solidly opposed consolidation. The State legislature is still pushing the idea in a misguided effort to save money, but it seems, for now at least that Tremont Consolidated Elementary School is safe.

What characterizes this school? Perhaps the most intriguing element is that students in this school, the poorest and most traditional on the island, have usually done as well on the Maine Educational Assessments as children from Mount Desert, the most affluent town, and have consistently outperformed children from the more sophisticated and affluent town of Bar Harbor and their larger neighbor Southwest Harbor. This has been particularly true for students when they take the 4th grade test. Eighth graders do not perform as well which I hope to study in a later paper. However, the guidance counselors at the High School have said many times that students from Tremont are the best prepared

and most ready to learn of island students. They add that usually the Tremont students are over-represented on the high honor and honor roles. And yet, these students do not go on to post-secondary education at the same rates as student from the other towns whom they have outscored only a few years before.

I will sketch reasons for this disparity, which I began to study in an earlier paper, and then go on to present a plan for parent involvement based on the work of the IRE and the Center as well as other writers, tailoring it to the needs of Tremont children.

THE PROBLEM:

In an earlier paper I identified the significant issue of the low rate at which students from traditional families in Downeast Maine go on to post-secondary education. The issue is important because " Maine ranks at or near the bottom nationally in the percent of students who go on to higher education (BDN, 1993). Yet, Maine students rank first on the NAEP tests in 1992 in Math and second in reading. Only 16.8 % of people living in Tremont have a bachelors degree or higher, 76% have at least graduated from high school (Census, 1992:23).

I further identified elements in Maine traditional culture that I think deter students from continuing their education. (This paper is in Appendix I.) Let me summarize these cultural traits that characterize many people from Downeast Maine.

FACTORS THAT COULD PROMOTE EDUCATION:

1) strong sense of family and community
2) strong work ethic
3) strong sense of morality and integrity, the "Puritan ethic"
4) relatively little alienation of the younger generation
5) pride and independence, integrity
6) importance of the "quality of life"
7) relative lack of interest in high status, prestige and material possessions

8) sense of humor and irony
9) ability to find practical solutions, inventiveness

These traits are reinforced by the stability and homogeneity of the population: 70% of Maine's people were born in Maine.

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO EDUCATION:

1) fatalism
2) belief in constancy: "If it was good enough for my grandfather it is good enough for my grandson.
3) fear of educating the next generation only to have them leave to find suitable jobs.
4) reluctance to assume debt
5) fear of the larger society, feeling of powerlessness and stigmatization as unsophisticated, feeling that it is a liability to come from Maine
6) lack of critical sense, susceptibility to rumor and petty gossip
7) feeling that someone in the community gets ahead only by taking from neighbors, not by creativity and hard work
8) reluctance to achieve because success will subject one to criticism and distrust
9) small-mindedness, insularity (exacerbated by homogeneity and stability of population)
10) reluctance to think abstractly or work on goals that do not have immediate practical value

There is much to admire in the culture of Downeast, Maine and much to lose if it changes. In many ways people like myself, well-educated outsiders, are part of the problem, as are others like developers who come here to find villages vulnerable to rapid development because they lack zoning restrictions .

ASPIRATIONS:

For over ten years the University of Maine's Aspirations Project has conducted extensive in-depth research into student aspirations. Using a ninety-five question survey designed over several years of testing, they have developed a national and international data bank of over 10,000 respondents which forms the base for much of their work. The University has also sponsored

projects in several schools in Maine. The University team, led by Dean Robert Cobb, and working with visiting scholars in residence Mihaly Cziksentmihalyi, Herbert Walberg and Theodore Sizer, has identified components of aspiration and conditions that they think must exist in a school if it is to have a climate conducive to high aspirations.

The team suggests that ambitions and inspiration comprise aspiration.

> *Ambitions* is a sense of goal orientation which, from the student's perspective, can be expressed as goals for the future... *Inspiration* describes when an individual becomes involved in an activity for its intrinsic value and enjoyment...Students who have high *ambitions* and low *inspiration*, or who have low *ambitions* and high *inspiration* fall into a category called *separation*...characterized by an individual who is involved in an activity, but is unsure why or by whose choice. A student who falls into the separation category is an individual with limited involvement in activities and little inherent sense of purpose of value in the future.
>
> Quaglia, 1994:2

Separation is similar to alienation. A student who is separated or alienated from the school will withdraw from the life of the school.

Cobb and his fellow researchers identified eight conditions that "have proven to have positive effects on the school organizationally and on all members of the staff individually..." These conditions "represent a return to common sense, back to the basics, back to the fact that there is nothing more important than a child's education." The team believes " it should be the goal of schools to create and sustain these conditions in the lives [sic] of every student.

These conditions include:

1. <u>Belonging:</u>
Belonging:..a type of relationship between at least two individuals characterized by a sense of connection, support, and community. *Belonging* includes the experience of being a valued member of a group and the diminishment of barriers between groups.
2. <u>Achievement:</u>

The condition of *achievement* for students must include effort, accomplishment, citizenship and perseverance... and is best measured not in terms of yearly test scores and intelligence quotients, but in terms of personal accomplishments...

3. Curiosity

Curiosity is characterized as inquisitiveness, an eagerness and strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a desire to satisfy the mind with new discoveries...

4. Mentoring:

Successful *mentoring* conveys important information to students about understanding and finding ways to exert some measure of control over one's environment, stimulates new interests, models constructive ways of relating to the world, and provides a caring, stable environment in an otherwise chaotic set of experiences...

5. Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the ability to believe in oneself... Teachers, parents and peers all have the ability and potential to help build a person's *self-confidence* and thus enhance the quality of one's academic and personal achievement.

6. Empowerment

A school system that supports the condition of *empowerment* is one that strives and succeeds in ultimately empowering its students.

7. Risk-taking

Risk-taking is defined as behavior that is informed by a knowledge of potential losses involved, an awareness of the significance of such losses, and some uncertainty about those losses. However, it is also a deliberate and thoughtful activity involving choosing healthy and sensible options.

8. Excitement

The condition of *excitement* involves being "worked-up" about something, being emotionally involved, and having an intense experience or desire of some kind. "

The above factors are conditions that have been observed in schools that are characterized as having students with a high level of both *inspiration* and *ambitions*.

Quaglia, 1994:6-7.

These conditions are a foundation for changing aspirations.

The word "raising" often precedes the word "aspirations" but we should ask why some aspirations are considered "lower." Is this part of our tendency to see those who are different as deficient? Dean Cobb was disappointed that politicians only paid attention to his suggestions about improving students' test

scores so they could compete more effectively in national and international markets, but did not hear what Cobb told them about "quality of Life." Cobb and his research team interviewed twenty-four people in depth. Their interviewees included clam-diggers, woodsmen and work-diggers. Cobb was struck by the enjoyment these people took in their own lives and their peace of mind. Although most lived close to poverty they valued their independence, ability to make their own decisions, spend time with their families and friends, be outside and pursue various forms of recreation like hunting and fishing. (The most successful clam-diggers make $40,000 a year, but the work is physically debilitating and hard to sustain).

Webster's Dictionary defines aspiration as " a longing for what is elevated or above one (Webster, 1960:53)." Too often we have warped this to mean earning more money and prestige. I suggest we look to the Latin again remembering that aspiration, inspiration and spirit share the root *spiro, spirare:* to breath into, which came to denote the breath of life breathed into man by a god (Bacchus was once the god of inspiration). Aspirations could be defined more broadly to include elevation of the spirit and mind not just as they are applied to earning a living but to living, not just to schooling but to education.

A PROGRAM FOR CHANGE:

Any attempt to change aspirations in our area of Maine must work with the whole community including grandparents, parents and children. I believe a successful program must be ecologically based because people reinforce each other and we must create a "critical mass" willing to change.

Let us look now at the cultural factors listed and see how a program of community and parental involvement could help raise the aspirations of students at Tremont School.

1. FATALISM:

> Fatalism is sometimes interpreted as a docility that is a trait of national character. Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people's behavior. It almost always is related to the power of destiny or fate or fortune - inevitable forces - or to a distorted view of God. Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed (especially the peasants, who are almost submerged in nature) see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God - as if God were the creator of this "organized disorder."
>
> Freire, 1993:44

Fatalism may be the most important barrier to aspiration. If you believe that you violate a law of nature or of God by achieving beyond "your place" in society, how can you dare aspire to what is "above" you?

In Tremont, it is critical that people from the community who are perceived as successful in the diverse ways there are to succeed, become a part of the lives of the children. The Samuel Gompers mentoring program would serve as a good model to counter the myth of fatalism. Tremont School could encourage high school students, returning college students, and adults members of the community to become mentors. Creating an Action Research Team would be another powerful tool to counter the power of this myth. If adults can join together to identify a problem, research that problem, and then make changes they will in the process learn that they can change their fate.

2. CONSTANCY: If it was good enough for my grandfather...

This is a recurrent theme in the conversation of parents and grandparents. and can be construed as an attempt to curtail change. An outreach to parents and grandparents that emphasizes the value of their knowledge and its application to today's world might deter them from counseling youngsters away from further education. Discussion groups led by a facilitator might begin to address some of these issues, but they are deeply held and will resist change. The facilitator could work with children and teachers to create curricula that honor the history of the area but help children and older relatives look at new skills. Homework projects that parents and children can do together such as those created by TIPS are ideal for this purpose as are activities in which several generations participate such as interviewing, journal writing, videos and scrapbooks that celebrate family history.

Another reason adults deride something new is that they fear looking ignorant. HomeWorkPlace, described later should help adults understand how to help their children. Putting a telephone and answering machine in each classroom would enable teachers to leave taped messages about homework and ways adults can assist children. The TIPS kits are another strategy to help parents feel useful and valued.

3. GROWING UP MEANS GOING AWAY:

The issues of maturing into adulthood are different for rural youth that they are for adolescents growing up in urban communities. Though the pattern of rural migration to cities has begun to change, still the mind-set of many Maine people is that their children will have to move away to get jobs that pay well. This myth becomes increasingly inaccurate as well-educated professional

people move into the state, create new businesses or fill high-level jobs. Rural youth must decide whether to:

> remain in the community or leave it... to inherit traditional work of questionable profitability or to move away for more stable and lucrative employment, to slip into the comfortable 'backward' traces of traditional adulthood or to 'step out' into the modern world... While the rural community struggles to maintain itself, the native adolescent struggles to grow up without having to sever himself/herself from either the native culture or the grander American scene...
>
> Major theorists depict as adulthood of intimate and fulfilling relationships and productive work as a state which is typically reached though a struggle with and eventual separation from one's childhood community. While the separation is not necessarily geographic for many youth, it practically always must be for rural youth.
>
> A final characteristic of youth's post-high school years was the importance of **living in Sawyer** to all of them...Youth stated that the familiarity of people, the presences of family, the quiet and beauty of the land, and the sense of ownership and security youth felt within the community made the thought (and in some cases the effort) of living elsewhere futile...Paths leading outward, and perhaps upward, which might appear normal to more cosmopolitan youth were clearly approached with ambivalence by many Sawyer youth.
>
> Donaldson, 1984 :1 , 2, 10

Donaldson's characterization of a mill town in rural Maine also captures the dilemma of adolescents from the coastal communities. For most being isolated from the traditional community is more than they want to bear.

In 1991 only 39% of Maine's 13,317 high school graduates went on to college or a university ((ME. Dept. of Ed., 1992:29. As mentioned, only 16.8% of the residents of Tremont have a college education Few students in Tremont go to college, and very few go to college outside a two hours radius of their house. Anecdotal evidence supports this but accurate statistics are hard to find, however, there are confirmed stories of Freshman who arrive at college but last

only a very short time. One young man even refused to get out of his parents car when they arrived at his new dorm, and returned home.

Maine traditional youth face some of the same problems Winters describes in referring to black mothers.

> Subcultural group members may have to violate the values and norms of the dominant culture to maintain favor with their referent group...When there is discontinuity between cultural and social structures, with each demanding a different set of behaviors and attitudes, the tension leads to a disintegration of norms...
>
> Winters, 1993:52

Although in Maine this discontinuity rarely leads to the normlessness Winters discusses many young people from traditional families must choose between the lure of the dominant culture and the comfort of home.

We must show children and their parents and grandparents that becoming educated does not make moving away inevitable. In a previous paper, I created an outreach program that addresses this issue. In summary, I would use the considerable talents and resources of people who summer in this community and are heads of major corporations. Students would work to identify, research, and create a practical solution to a problem faced by people at work. They would present their solutions and have a chance to visit sponsoring corporations to see how similar issues are handled. (Please see Appendix I for a more complete explication of this program.)

It is critical that student's understand they can create jobs in Maine as well as learn sophisticated skills required to fill existing jobs. However, it is probably even more important to work with parents, particularly mothers who feel threatened by the prospect that their children will become educated and move away. Here again, the facilitator would meet with groups of parents to discuss

these issues. I think it may be wise to present these discussion groups as having a more utilitarian purpose that will benefit the school and children. Otherwise, it may be difficult to get parents to join the groups.

4. RELUCTANCE TO ASSUME DEBT:

I think Maine people may be wise to avoid debt because they have few resources with which to pay it back. The tax form check-off for donations to a state scholarship fund I suggested in an earlier paper might provide some funds and even more importantly, community support for post-secondary education (See Appendix 1). However, there are several ways to help people understand the value of investing in education and alternatives for financing. The guidance counselors in our local high school can not do a good job in college counseling because they are responsible for too many students. I think each town should run an after-school program where students from the high school and elementary school could meet to do homework, seek extra help and vocational and college guidance (more about this later). People staffing these centers would have to be volunteers as there is little money to fund "extra programs, but I do not think it is unrealistic that ten volunteers could be found to give up to two hours a week. These tutors and mentors would be trained to help student's plan for and apply to colleges or vocational schools. The volunteers would meet on a regular basis with a professional teacher or guidance counselor.

5. FEAR OF THE DOMINANT SOCIETY, FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

Freire states that :

> self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are

> incapable of learning anything--that they are sick, lazy, unproductive--that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.
>
> Freire, 1993:45

Many of the techniques offered by IRE and The Center, as well as others will work in concert. Raising people's self-esteem, dispelling their feelings of inferiority, will take time and must be approached from many avenues. However, the teacher's attitudes towards his or her students is critical. One reason for the success of Tremont School appears to be that six of the 11 teachers are from the community. Like Donaldson's "intrepid" students, they returned home, bringing skills to share, understanding of local culture and an ability to value their students. I recommend training all teachers in sensitivity to local culture and their own prejudices. They need to understand the impact they can have on their students and that the children will live up to their expectations. Davies reminds us that:

> the mind-set of many urban teachers and administrators is that the causes of low achievement and academic failure in their schools lie primarily in the characteristics of the children and their families -- race, social class, poverty, "foreign" cultures, problems of crime, violence, and drugs... Changing this mind-set may be at the heart of any effort to seek academic success for all children.
>
> Davies, 1990:11

The negative mind-set of rural administrators and teachers is equally devastating to children who are discriminated against.

If teachers learn how to learn from their students, they will see the many strengths that have enabled people of less advantaged cultures to cope with severe adversity. Michael, our son, once told me he had just learned that a girl in his sixth grade class lived with her family in the back of their old station wagon. The child usually wore the same dress, and was not always clean, but, how extraordinary that she came to school every day.

Secondly, I hope that parent discussion groups will focus on the incredible strengths of their own culture, a culture that has made Maine products stand out in national and international markets for integrity of workmanship and design. There is much to be proud of, but we don't take time to celebrate success, except in sports. For example, I have found no parents who were aware of how well Maine 4th graders rank on the NAEP. In short, we must devise strategies to raise awareness in teachers, administrators and children of their strengths and creative power.

6. LACK OF CRITICAL SENSE, SUSCEPTIBILITY TO RUMOR

The most hopeful way to deal with petty divisiveness created by insularity and lack of critical sense is through expanded communication. Rumor festers in a closed environment. Setting up telephone trees, putting telephones and answering machines in classrooms, training parents as home visitors with awareness of the importance of intercepting rumors and correcting misinformation might help create "critical sense" in the community. It will be important to develop a sense of credibility and trust that encourages people to use these strategies.

7 + 8) GETTING AHEAD MEANS TAKING AWAY, RELUCTANCE TO ACHIEVE FOR FEAR OF COMMUNITY CRITICISM

Again, I think the process of action research can help enormously in dispelling these two barriers to education. I would also encourage group and community projects such as the Tremont School Fund which is an ongoing organization and the Playground Improvement Project, a one-time event.

There are lessons to learn from recent immigrants to The United States. Researchers have found that the extraordinary success of students in

American schools who recently fled Indochina and endured awful hardship is due in large part to " Indochinese values that foster interdependence and a family-based orientation to achievement (Caplan, 1992:20)." The authors paint a vivid portrait of ways these families promote academic success.

> Nowhere is the family's commitment to accomplishments and education more evident than in time spent on homework. During high school, Indochinese students spend an average of three hours and ten minutes per day, in junior high an average of two and a half hours; and in grade school, and average of two hours and five minutes...
>
> Among the refugee families, then, homework clearly dominates household activities during weeknights. Although the parents' lack of education and facility with English often prevents them from engaging in the content of the exercise, they set standards and goals for the evening and facilitate their children's studies by assuming responsibility for chores and other considerations.
>
> After dinner, the table is cleared, and homework begins. The older children, both male and female, help their younger siblings. Indeed, they seem to learn as much from teaching as from being taught. It is reasonable to suppose that a great amount of learning goes on at these times -- in terms of skills, habits, attitudes and expectations as well as the content of a subject. The younger children, in particular, are taught not only subject matter but how to learn. Such sibling involvement demonstrates how a large family can encourage and enhance academic success.
>
> Caplan, 1992:18 -19

I would like to create an after-school program that brings parents and children to the school gymnasium at least once a week to do homework and socialize.

If I were running this program (and the point is that I am not), I would call it "HomeWorkPlace" and have at least one teacher present as well as high school students, food, and music (not too raucous). After two to three hours of work there would be an activity such as a pick-up game of basketball or a dance. People could bring their own work, and also act as a resource for everyone else. For example, some adults might be studying for the GED , college or

graduate courses or professional tests, others learning how to work with their children on homework using the TIPS kits. The high schools students would help the younger students but could also get help from adults and from younger students. For example, younger students could help drill vocabulary for English class or College Board tests.. Students and adults could read to younger children in a quiet corner. HomeWorkPlace would be a community substitute for the Indochinese dining room, a place to share and discuss goals and aspirations, strategies, methods and attitudes. It is important that this take place in a community setting which thereby sanctions the discussion.

9. PETTINESS AND SMALL-MINDEDNESS, INSULARITY: Participating in the Action Research Team should help members work through pettiness and small-mindedness on at least some issues. Reading with a purpose, to understand what has already been discovered about an issue the group has decided to research, should open participants to the outside world as well.

Telephone trees and a strong Home Visitors program would be beneficial. In addition, I think there should be school field trips for families. Perhaps the school could sponsor weekend cultural trips for families and/or social and cultural events in the school that attract families. Assemblies, movies, lectures, etc. might attract a wide-range of people if they were well-presented. Val Perkins, The Principal of Tremont School told me recently that grandparents and parents often call him during the summer to ask when school events will be held so they can plan ahead! He reports families say they would much rather go to games and productions at the elementary school than the high school even if they don't have children in the school because it is part of the community. Perhaps the school can sponsor events that will open people's awareness.

Val Perkins also noted that sailing and going to war have been the most important way Mainers people learned about other parts of the world. The Civil War, the World Wars, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf drew Maine boys and, now, girls away from Maine, often for the first time in their lives and Maine has long been respected for her fine merchant mariners.

10) RELUCTANCE TO THINK ABSTRACTEDLY OR DEVELOP LONG-TERM GOALS:

So many of the other barriers to education we see in Maine culture, like fatalism, feeling powerless and inferior mitigate against making long-range goals particularly for high achievement. If we can change these patterns, we may also change people's ability to think abstractly and engage in long-term projects. Action-Research, though it should start in small tasks so people are not daunted, may take on larger and more involved projects over time.

MUMMA:

Mumma, like her British counterpart "Mum" wields great influence in a Maine family. To counter cultural barriers to aspirations of Maine children, a program must focus on Maine parents, particularly Maine mothers. I would make creating strategies to reach parents the highest priority and I would start with young parents of new babies although I would prefer to include all parents with babies.

The "Boxes for Babes" project developed by Ferguson-Florissant School District offers a good model, however, even this project found it hard to interest teen-age parents, those most in need of services. I would revise the contents of the boxes to include items that might appeal to teen-age parents. There are pitfalls to watch out for, however. If the kit included coupons donated by area merchants for things like fast food, music, make-up, etc. the parents might use

the coupons but not the items designed to encourage learning and interaction with their baby. Conversations with young parents about what they would like to find in the boxes might alleviate this problem and identify items that would appeal and educate simultaneously. This program should be offered in conjunction with a Home Visitors project.

HomeWorkPlace could include classes in baby care as well as provide care for children whose parents come to study and teach. There could also be a clothing, toy ,book and equipment bank run by parents. People would donate an item to the bank and get a coupon to purchase something else. Volunteers would repair and price items. These activities would give older people in the community a way to share ideas with younger parents. The facilitator could start discussion groups that would meet at HomeWorkPlace. It is hard to attract people to such groups but there must be a place to discuss issues that are vital to the community and its children if there is to be reflection and change.

A Home Visiting program would also help provided that the Home Visitors were well-prepared to discuss aspirations and education. I would work with a group of grandmothers, hoping to convince them of the value of further education and the possibility that well-educated young people would return to enrich the community with their skills and energy.

SUMMARY:

Freire shows us that "cultural synthesis serves the ends of organization; organization serves the ends of liberation (Freire, 1993, 164)." Cultural synthesis does not demand that "the objectives of revolutionary action should be limited by the aspirations expressed in the world view of the people." In other words, people's "demands" or possibilities should not be limited by what has already occurred to them. It is the responsibility of the educator to offer new alternatives " by posing the meaning of that very demand as a problem (Freire, 1993:163-164)." In researching and reflecting upon the answer to such problems people will uncover new questions and new insights.

The work of IRE and The Center suggests enormously hopeful means to create honest, open communication on a human scale between the different constituencies in a school community. A community that does not believe it can retain its young people predicts its own end and tries to forestall what it thinks inevitable by opposing what it defines as progress. I believe that through projects such as those I have outlined in this paper we can redefine progress and raise the aspirations of traditional Maine youth so that by education they enrich their own communities joining the best of both worlds.

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